THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT GENERATION: A PREVENTION PERSPECTIVE

A White Paper Commissioned by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

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Introduction

Under the Wisconsin Works (W-2) initiative, Wisconsin's reform efforts have successfully moved welfare families into the labor market. At the same time, the state's reform efforts have uncovered issues and challenges previously obscured by the income-support approach to assisting low-income families with children. For many years, welfare focused primarily on mailing out checks accurately and efficiently. In consequence, root causes of economic disadvantage and social isolation were ignored and, in particular, the most needy were exempted from receiving intensive assistance. Given the newer 'hands-on' approach adopted by W-2 agencies, workers have found that families often face multiple challenges. In attempting to address these challenges, they also have discovered that support systems do not always work in concert because of divergent institutional cultures and competitive professional perspectives. As a result, some families flounder and disadvantaged children get lost in the shuffle. The consequences of such failures are evident both in the short term and, more importantly, in what happens to at-risk children over time.

In this paper we argue that the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), through W-2, can play a crucial role both by facilitating a more comprehensive approach to the challenges faced by families and working to prevent some of those challenges from occurring in the first instance. This expanded role focuses on families with multiple challenges and families at-risk of experiencing problems in the future. Thus, we term this expanded role the "investment-prevention" approach to helping disadvantaged and at-risk families; it is hereafter referred to as the IP perspective. This IP perspective is not far removed from the concept of *social inclusion* that dominates social policy thinking in many parts of Europe, where interventions increasingly are dedicated to ensuring full participation in mainstream society.[1]

Although preventing tomorrow's social problems today is an enticing policy objective, it is one that typically eludes policymakers and service providers. Shifting the policy focus from the here-and-now to a future orientation is a difficult task in the current policy environment of rigid, categorical funding streams (familiarly known as funding "silos") and highly targeted program missions. This environment, however, is slowly changing as local service providers recognize the importance of collaboration and state agencies take crucial steps to eliminate the barriers to such collaboration. The structure and financing of federal programs, however, often impede the realization of a prevention agenda. The transition to performance-based governance, a worthy goal, sometimes leads to a focus on short-term outcomes. Since institutional rewards are determined by what can be measured in real time, as opposed to successes that might be realized down the road, efforts to pursue longer-range goals can get lost.

Recognizing the potentialities and the challenges of this next generation of reform, the Department of Workforce Development, which administers W-2 and other work programs in Wisconsin, commissioned this paper on prevention as part of their *White Paper* series on the future of welfare reform. This paper stretches our thinking about reform to encompass a cross-

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[1] For example, see An Offer You Can't Refuse: Workfare in International Perspective, edited by Ivar Lodemal and Heather Trickey. (Great Britain: The Policy Press, 2000).

generation strategy. We examine how services and opportunities can be structured to detect actual or potential problems so that early intervention is possible. This often requires working with whole families, taking into account how children and families develop and thrive. This approach, therefore, focuses not only on the economic realities low-income families face but also on the social challenges many of the same families face.

This paper begins with a brief history of prevention in social services. Then we tackle the issue of prevention by attempting to answer six questions about the concept of prevention and how it fits within a welfare reform agenda. What is prevention? What are we trying to prevent? How does the prevention perspective fit within a work-oriented assistance program? What are the tradeoffs? How do we turn the concept into something real? Finally, what are the next steps?

Prevention: The New Old Approach to Social Services. American social welfare policy traditionally has addressed "family matters," as the quotation from President Kennedy indicates. This suggests that the prevention perspective is not new. In the early years of AFDC and its predecessors, Mother's Pension programs, the purpose of social assistance to poor families was to raise productive children. Until the early 1970s, the provision of income support was typically accompanied by services to strengthen family functioning and to integrate families into mainstream society. It was not unusual for families, as a condition of receiving cash assistance, to be carefully examined to determine what kind of environment was being created for the children.

> *The goals of our public welfare programs must be positive and constructive…. [It] must stress the integrity and preservation of the family unit. It must contribute to the attack on dependency, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown, illegitimacy, ill health, and disability. It must reduce the incidence of these problems, prevent their occurrence and recurrence, and strengthen and protect the vulnerable in a highly competitive world.*
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> *President John F. Kennedy---1962*

Then the United States shifted to an income support strategy in the name of economic efficiency. The basic function of welfare, its "core technology," was to get a check out the door efficiently and accurately. Families receiving benefits had little interaction with the system except to verify income and other factors that affected eligibility. This income support focus dominated American social policy for a relatively brief period, but it was during this time that the integrity of the family seemed to disintegrate. (Whether the disintegration was causally related or merely coincidence is a matter of dispute.) The divorce rate doubled in the early 1970s and the proportion of all births outside marriage climbed from one in twenty to one in three. By the early 1990s, over half of all infants could expect to live apart from both natural parents for at part of their childhood.

To many, the federal cash assistance entitlement seemed inconsistent with the prevailing values of society, and targeted income transfers appeared to abet the very conditions they purported to address. Families remained poor, since the benefits could never be set high enough to move families out of poverty, and yet these benefits appeared to discourage work and savings. Targeting single-parent families seemed to encourage counter-productive choices regarding sex, marriage, and family formation among young women and men. In addition, the move away from individualized case management meant that depression, drug addiction, child safety, and other serious family problems often went undetected and untreated. For some people, a steady but small stream of income without counseling and treatment enabled self-

destructive behavior. Lack of connection to the workforce, marriage, and other mainstream societal institutions set many poor families apart from the rest of society.

Beginning in the late 1980s, Wisconsin led the country in focusing policy attention back on the behaviors that result in poverty, family and community dysfunction, and social isolation. One of the first significant initiatives of (then) Governor Thompson's reform agenda was *Learnfare*, a program begun in 1987 that was designed to "break the cycle of dependency" by motivating recipient families to keep their children in school. Later, the *Parental and Family Responsibility Initiative,* more commonly known as *Bridefare*, was introduced explicitly to promote marriage as well as more sensible fertility decisions among poor young mothers. The basic structure of the welfare system, however, essentially remained unchanged. By the mid-1990s, it became clear that systemic reform was needed at a national level. In the summer of 1996, the U.S. Congress passed and the president signed a bill calling for the end of AFDC and replacing it with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

THE FOUR PURPOSES OF TANF*

1) Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;

2) End the dependence of needy families on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;

3) Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for prevention and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and

4) Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

*Public Law 104-193. Sec. 401(a).

TANF is better thought of as a funding stream than a program. As a block grant to states, TANF prescribes little in the way of policies. States can use TANF funding for any program or service that fits within the purposes of TANF—preventing dependence through increasing work and job preparation, increasing marriage rates, and decreasing out-of-wedlock births (see box).[2]

The flexibility provided under TANF, which allows states to direct funds to the most appropriate services, highlights the inflexibility of most other programs and funding streams focused on the same families. For years, public and private sources have spent considerable time and resources on the most vulnerable in our society (families with no income, children in unsafe homes, parents with severe drug problems, those who are homeless) through a series of targeted programs (cash assistance, child welfare, drug and alcohol treatment programs, homeless shelters, etc.). Although these programs often serve the same families, their services are usually uncoordinated. By treating only one aspect of a family's life, these interventions limit their scope to narrowly prescribed boundaries. And by focusing only on the crisis at hand, these interventions forfeit the opportunity to address long-term problems and prevent future problems.

TANF also highlights the fact that the income support strategy, which dominated public assistance from the 1970s to the late-1980s, proved so controversial and contentious that the

[2] Under its predecessor, AFDC, the federal government set policies for cash assistance and provided states with roughly half the funding to operate welfare. States could only get this funding, however, if they followed a strict set of rules and regulations. States had little room to innovate and even less room to transfer AFDC funding to services other than cash assistance.

possibility of a more ambitious social agenda went largely unexplored. In the recent reform era, policymakers have begun to consider more ambitious agendas. Over the past several years, state and local officials have been quite successful in moving low-income adults into the labor market. As agencies engaged more of their caseload, they saw the extent to which remaining cases presented welfare agencies with multiple challenges. In response, the cutting edge of reform evolved toward providing more holistic support to the entire family in the context of the communities in which they reside, not just the adult recipient. Increasingly, policymakers are recognizing that the ultimate purpose of reform is to prevent dysfunction and dependence in the first instance, by promoting independence and by prudent investments in families and children; this is labeled *family support* in the text box titled *Perspectives on Reform*.[3]

> Well, five years ago we talked solely about benefits, we talked about timeliness and accuracy, period. It was solely financial. Today, we're talking about early childhood, we're talking about prevention, we're talking about serving families holistically.
>
> Deb Bingaman
> Iowa Welfare Administrator

For example, Wisconsin's proportional spending on what have been termed *family formation and stability* issues increased almost sevenfold between the 1996 fiscal year and the 2000 fiscal year, from 2.5 percent of all TANF and state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) spending to 16.4 percent of all spending. Many of these dollars are directed toward investments in children and youth as strategies for stabilizing families or in *community supports* designed to strengthen families.

Wisconsin is not alone. In the six neighboring states that participate in the Midwest Welfare Peer Assistance Network (WELPAN), spending on family formation and stability functions increased from about 6 percent of all TANF expenditures in 1996 to 18 percent in 2000.[4] The state of Ohio, for example, has spent almost $700 million dollars on its Prevention, Retention, and Contingency initiative over the past several years. This is seen by state officials as a "new system" that is "proactive, looking forward to *prevent* and strategically *intervene* when the investment can forestall long-term dependency."

Perspectives on Reform

Income Support
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Job Placement
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Work Support
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Family Support
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Community Support
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Prevention

Still, the concept of "prevention" is neither well understood nor fully accepted. Moreover, it is a challenge much bigger than W-2, welfare reform, or DWD, requiring that a whole host of public and private programs and the entire community buy into its execution.

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[3] The *Perspectives on Reform* framework was developed by the Midwest Welfare Peer Assistance Network (WELPAN) in the year 2000, when states had resources to invest in new initiatives. When given the opportunity, states and local governments began shifting resources toward more ambitious policy agendas that involved whole communities and that were more forward looking.

[4] WELPAN consists of a group officials from seven Midwestern states, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin

Question 1: What Is Prevention?

As suggested earlier, we conceptualize the investment-prevention (IP) agenda as an approach, or a perspective, rather than a specific program. Families seeking help touch government programs at various times of need, and in ways that transcend the artificial silos within which public programs operate. In fact, these investments are not exclusively made by public institutions, but rather include all investments made by families and nonprofits that enhance the future prospects of families and children. However, the federal government in particular tends to organize social assistance efforts into narrow funding and regulatory silos that artificially segregate forms of assistance into specific problem areas: lack of food, housing problems, or threats to a child's safety. These silos make it difficult to address the underlying issues that often are manifested in a lack of income. Silos also make it difficult to work with the host of private community organizations and supports—churches and community centers as well as mainstream services such as schools and hospitals–-to which families reach out in times of need.

Connecting these services and interventions through a series of collaborations is a way to address long-term problems and prevent future problems. The IP focus thus demands that society adopt a new approach to social assistance. In the Old Welfare – New Welfare box, we depict alternate attributes of social welfare delivery systems. Traditional systems (problem amelioration) focus on the provision of specific benefits or services; the IP perspective pushes us in the direction of thinking about behaviors and outcomes. Old ways of thinking typically had us focus on the adult in the household; emerging strategies have us considering the whole family. Old ways of thinking had us consider the situation only for today, or this month. We might term this a point-in-time perspective. Increasingly, we now think about issues and challenges over time and across generations—a point-in-process perspective.

OLD WELFARE	***NEW WELFARE***
Problem Amelioration	Investment-Prevention
Benefits	*Behavior*
Services	*Solutions*
Adult recipient	*Whole family*
Static concept (PIT)	*Longitudinal (PIP)*
Bureaucratic orientation	*Professional model*
Autonomous worker	*Collaborative worker*
Autonomous agency	*Transparent boundaries*
Risk aversive	*Risk taking*
Outcomes	*Opportunities*

Old ways of approaching social assistance depended on autonomous workers in very isolated agencies carrying out a limited set of tasks using bureaucratic methods. Now we see collaborative workers operating in networks of service systems employing professional models of intervention. What had been a risk-aversive mentality (don't make an error in getting the check out the door) becomes a risk-taking system—find ways to improve the prospects of this family and child(ren).

The IP perspective, in short, anticipates rather than responds. It seeks comprehensive solutions rather than Band-Aids. It involves the whole family, even the community, as opposed to isolated individuals and cases. This wider focus requires a new approach to social services. Officials in Wisconsin and elsewhere are embracing this new approach by trying, where feasible, to blend funding and policy silos into integrated service delivery systems. Some services are made available to broad segments of the community and some are targeted upon

the most difficult to serve. These shifts in perspective, from income deficits to personal functioning, from the individual adult to the family and the community, and from the immediate situation to an intergenerational perspective, are the essence of the IP concept.

Question 2: What Are We Trying to Prevent?

If the IP perspective anticipates rather than responds, what are we anticipating? What are we trying to prevent? In the broadest terms, we are trying to prevent a lack of opportunity.[5] Most commonly, society connects a lack of opportunity with a lack of income.

The best understood measure of income poverty is the poverty line, a set of income thresholds created in the mid-1960s at the height of the War on Poverty begun by the Johnson administration. Every year the federal government sets a poverty threshold that varies by family size but does not vary geographically. The poverty threshold for the year 2001 is $14,269 for a family of three (one adult and two children). If a family's total income is less than that family's threshold, then the family, and every individual in it, is considered poor. The poverty thresholds are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index. The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and does not include capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, food stamps, and the Earned Income Tax Credit). Although there is much debate over whether this measure is the appropriate one, it is the most widely accepted measure available and it does enable us to look at changes in poverty over time.[6]

Child Poverty Spells, 1982-1991

No. of years in poverty	Percent of children
0 yrs	73.3%
1–2 yrs	12.3%
3–5 yrs	7.5%
6–8 yrs	3.2%
9–10 yrs	3.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Indicators of Welfare Dependence: Annual Report to Congress." March 2001.

[5] Robert Haveman in his book *Starting Even* talks about two generic principles concerning the basic purposes of social assistance. The first is the wish to equalize outcomes. This is similar to income or resource distribution strategies through which society tries to ameliorate the wide discrepancies in earnings, wealth, and access to resources that exist in society. The second approach focuses less on equalizing outcomes and more on evening out discrepancies in the opportunities of young adults as they start out in life. Allowing for the possibility that individuals may make counterproductive choices that adversely affect their well-being, this version of equity suggests that parental choices and environmental circumstances that negatively affect the odds of adult success ought to be minimized. We believe that a successful IP-based perspective must incorporate a notion of equity, not necessarily of outcomes, but certainly of opportunity. Therefore, the IP perspective is trying to prevent a lack of opportunity. Robert H. Haveman, *Starting Even: An Equal Opportunity Program to Combat the Nation's New Poverty.* N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

[6] See Robert Haveman and Edward Wolff. "Who are the Asset Poor?: Levels, Trends and Composition, 1983-1998," Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper no. 1227-01, April 2001.

The good news is that in 2000, the U.S. poverty rate was the lowest it had been in the past 20 years. The bad news is that 11.3 percent of the U.S. population (31 million people) were poor, compared to around 5 percent in a number of European countries. And the poverty rate for children is higher, around 15.7 percent. Although this represents a drop since 1998, when the child poverty rate was 18.3 percent, it still represents 11 million children nationwide. The annual Kids Count report published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that in 1998 the overall poverty rate was 8.8 percent; 19 percent of Wisconsin kids lived in working poor families and 5 percent of kids lived in extreme poverty (with family incomes below 50% of poverty level).[7]

Most people who are poor are not poor for long. Nearly half (47 percent) of all poverty spells ended within 4 months and three-fourths ended within a year. Only 16 percent of all such spells were longer than 20 months. However, African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to have longer spells of poverty. And children are more likely than others to experience long-term poverty, especially poverty of 9 or 10 years' duration.[8]

Most troubling is that income poverty is associated with other indicators of personal and family distress. Compared to kids above the poverty line, children below the poverty line are more likely to have difficulty in school, become teen parents, and, as adults, earn less and be unemployed more frequently.[9] Because opportunity can be hamstrung by a lack of health, a lack of positive and nurturing relationships, and a whole host of other issues, society is approaching a new definition of poverty which includes a lack of money but also recognizes the complexities of family life and the effects of socioeconomic context on families and child well-being.

The Issue of Causation: The Seduction of Simple Solutions. What causes these negative outcomes? Is it a lack of income, dependence, out-of-wedlock births and the absence of fathers in the lives of their children, institutional racism, the economy, or perverse incentives in government programs? There is a beguiling notion in public policy that a single cause, and thus a single cure, can be found for the most intractable of social ills. Crime, teen pregnancy, drugs, the breakdown of the family, community dysfunction are laid at the feet of income poverty, welfare use, or some other single contribution. For those who believe in this kind of simple causation, the solutions are equally simple-minded—end income poverty through generous cash transfers or end dependency through the elimination of public assistance. This is the public policy equivalent of the alchemist's dream—finding a simple, transforming approach to life's complications.

Reality is not simple and the advancement out of poverty is not linear. Most families have many starts and stops along the way as they cope with issues other than low income—depression, drug addiction, short-term disabilities, and so forth. A recent study of welfare mothers in

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[7] *Poverty in the United States: 2000.* Report P60-214, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2001.

[8] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Indicators of Welfare Dependence: Annual Report to Congress." March 2001.

[9] Child Stats, *America's Children*, p. 14, http://www.childstats.gov/ac2001/pdf/econ.pdf.

Michigan found that women on welfare experience more personal barriers, such as depression, domestic violence, and health problems, than the general population of women.[10]

Along the way, these families may need help in varying degrees of intensity. Some of these services will be traditional—cash assistance, child-care assistance, drug and alcohol counseling. Others will be nontraditional—new worker peer groups meeting at local churches, or a budgeting class at a local community center. Service providers need to connect in different ways to ensure that this breadth of services is available.

The critical insight of this generation of reform is that there are no silver bullets. Simply shoring up income shortfalls, the premise of the negative income tax movement of the late 1960s, will not necessarily remedy all the ills associated with poverty. Nor will all problems magically disappear if dependency on cash assistance is ended. Although some income supports remain necessary, and the responsibility-focused reforms of the 1990s have remarkably broad public support, society must also directly address individual, family, and community problems.

Question 3: How Does the Investment-Prevention Perspective Fit within a Work-Oriented Assistance Program?

An IP initiative may be in itself compelling and justified, absent any explicit linkage to welfare reform. After all, one might legitimately argue that W-2 is a work program, the coherence of which might well be undermined by expanding the scope of activities and goals under the W-2 umbrella.

We make no argument that an IP agenda should be mounted under the sole auspices of W-2. But it does seem reasonable to argue that W-2 should be an active and important player in any such agenda. The reason for this is, quite simply, that work and family are inseparable phenomena. The underlying rationale for this connection lies in what we call the *work-family nexus,* which is based on three assertions:

1. **Strong families help create productive workers**
2. **Productive workers help create strong families**
3. **Strong families and productive workers help create healthy children**

The simplicity of these statements powerfully ties together the objectives of a series of otherwise unconnected programs. We take each statement in turn.

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[10] A summary of the Women's Employment Study conducted in Michigan under the direction of Professor Sandra Danziger can be found in the August (2001) volume of *The Forum*, a publication of the Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism, the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University (New York). It is published in the Research Forum web sites at http:\\www.researchforum.org (search under "Publications).

Strong Families ® Productive Workers. Let us assume that welfare reform, at base, ought to focus on workforce development issues and outcomes. Strong families would still remain a critical outcome. If workers or job seekers are concerned about problems at home, they are less likely to be successful in the workplace. Troubled children or partners, dysfunctional relationships, or counterproductive coping strategies (e.g., substance abuse) can adversely affect how one functions in society and in the labor market. For example, a parent who is continually being called to her child's school to address disciplinary problems may have trouble meeting the demands of a full-time job. Functional families, in short, are an intermediate step toward, or simultaneous condition of, good workers. The connection between work and family is particularly salient for single parents.

In White Paper 3, *Toward Work Stability and Career Advancement—The Next Stage of Reform*, the tenuous character of early attachment to the labor market was detailed, particularly for those in the early stages of acculturation to the world of work. Deficits in hard and soft skills clearly play a role here. But for many, the problem lies in the domain of family functioning. And nowhere is this more likely to occur than during the first few months of employment when employers are assessing the fitness of prospective workers. A number of studies have concluded that employers primarily want workers who are reliable and reasonably motivated.[11] But dependability and motivation are two skills that are difficult to achieve when family issues arise.

Productive Workers ® Strong Families. Work, or increased labor force participation, is not an end in itself. Although work-based reforms can be justified on equity grounds (most mothers with children are now in the labor market), they can also be justified on grounds of efficiency (work is a more promising route out of poverty than dependence on cash welfare). Other justifications are also compelling. Work stabilizes families, providing structure and discipline, facilitating appropriate role models and connecting families to broader social networks. It is a form of inclusion in broader society and its governing norms. And work can provide challenges and opportunities. In a sense, work is an intermediate objective in the pursuit of the longer-term goal of healthier families and communities.

A report by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics suggests that secure parental employment reduces the incidence of poverty and some of the risks for children that are associated with poverty. Secure employment frequently leads to increased availability of health insurance and health care. It may also improve a child's psychological well-being and family functioning by reducing stress and other negative effects caused by unemployment or underemployment. A recent study of W-2 applicants found that parents who were working or had worked in the past year were much less likely to be involved with child protective service systems (about three-fifths the rate) than those who had not worked during the past calendar year.[12] In the midst of this good news, troubling findings on the effect of work-focused welfare

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[11] For example, see Harry Holzer, *What Employers Want: Job Prospects for Less-Educated Worker,* New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 1996.

[12] Mark Courtney, Irving Piliavin, and Peter Power, "Involvement of TANF Applicants with Child Protective Services," Institute for Research on Poverty, Discussion Paper no. 1229-01, July 2001.

reform programs on adolescents is immerging. While these findings are not overwhelming, they do require further examination.[13]

Strong Families & Productive Workers ® Healthy Children. Investments in strong families and productive workers can also be justified on the grounds that these are critical in raising productive children. Public policy in the United States has treated families with children differently, with more attention and care. The attention we give children is not haphazard, but rather premised on the special place afforded children as crucial resources for the future of society. And while U.S. public policy has always been uneasy about redistributive policies to create equal outcomes in society for adults, it has been more sympathetic toward giving children and youth reasonable opportunities to succeed as adults. For this reason, universal public education was an early component of our national social safety net and education remains an investment universally appreciated. Reducing variation at the starting line of adult life has traditionally been justified on equity and efficiency grounds.

Recent findings reported by Child Trends show that both labor market attachment and family structure and functioning have important consequences for children and youth.[14] For example, youth who fail to make a successful transition to the labor force are at a greatly increased risk of being dependent on public assistance when they become adults, particularly if they are from families receiving welfare or are living in low-income families. The National Survey of American Families found that the proportion of teens that had established an attachment to the labor market was lower in families dependent on cash welfare than in families that had recently left or never received welfare.[15]

Some of the most essential functions of society involve family formation, community participation, and work. All of these are tied together in critical ways. The behaviors and attitudes associated with success in one aspect of life are typically important to success in other areas. Similarly, programs and policies affecting one dimension must likewise be integrated with programs and policies focused on related functional areas.

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[13] Morris, et. al. "How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research," New York: MDRC. March 2001.

[14] There is a growing literature on these issues, a literature far too extensive to review here. See *The Unfinished Business of Welfare Reform: Improving Prospects for Poor Children and Youth,* Washington DC: Child Trends (April 2002) and the Child Trends Research Brief titled *Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do About It?,* Washington DC: Child Trends (June 2002).

[15] Brett Brown, "Teens, Jobs, and Welfare: Implications for Social Policy," Child Trends, Washington, DC, August 2001.

Question 4: What Are the Tradeoffs in an Investment-Prevention Agenda?

Because the IP perspective is not a specific program but a way of thinking about social assistance, widely differing interventions targeting quite varied populations fit under this rubric. To make this point, we use a simple metaphor—the telescope. Some IP strategies address issues in broader populations (they use a broad lens) whereas other strategies are intensive and focused on limited target groups (they use a tight lens). And some strategies are between the two extremes. These focus services on those at risk rather than the general population or those already deeply involved with public assistance programs. These three strategies are called the population-intensity tradeoff because there is a tradeoff, inherent between how much we do and how many families can be reached. For each, we include some examples of how W-2 agencies in concert with other services providers could implement these strategies.

Core Agency Goals for Wraparound Services

- Collaboration over funding
- Team approach across agencies
- Family-centered approach
- Self-sufficiency stressed
- Consumer involvement in all aspects of the project
- Gender/culture-specific treatment
- Work focus
- Strengths-based
- Builds on natural and community supports
- Growth from environments that encourage learning

Broad-lens or broad-range prevention. Broad-lens initiatives generally (1) cast a wide net in the hope of helping families whose issues and problems are not yet manifest or fully developed, and (2) strive to provide individuals and families with the tools to avoid future problems. They are appropriate where potential problems are relatively rare and not transparent. These initiatives are prevention-oriented in the truest sense of the word. They attempt to detect future problems early, unlike most service strategies, which respond after problems become severe enough to warrant public attention. For example, access to traditional welfare-to-work programs is typically based on receipt of assistance, a perverse logic that conditions valuable forms of help on doing things that are counterproductive to the family—becoming dependent on assistance. The child welfare system is more extreme in this regard. Intervention usually only occurs after the situation has badly deteriorated, often to the point where the character of the intervention is legal rather than ameliorative in nature.

Most likely, W-2 agencies will not take on the task of broad-range prevention. But they have significant expertise in the challenges faced by low-income families and can play a role in helping the community determine the prevention agenda. Unlike the W-2 agencies, DWD may be able to play a wider, strategic role in broad-range prevention efforts, even though local communities, as we earlier noted, are the most knowledgeable and therefore the best candidates for coordinating prevention efforts at all levels.

How would this work in practice? The state of Vermont proves an example. In 1994, Vermont embarked on an outcome-based prevention planning strategy. This effort was spearheaded by the State Team for Children, Families, and Individuals, which consists of the division directors of state agencies that serve children, families, and individuals, state coordinators of interagency teams, directors of several major service and advocacy organizations, people from higher education institutions, parents, and the coordinators of Vermont's twelve Regional Partnerships.

The State Team and the Regional Partnerships work closely to foster relationships that are reciprocal and systems that are collaborative.

Using broad community input, the State Team identified a series of key indicators of child, family, and individual well-being. During the first two years, the State Team focused on one outcome each month in an effort to determine which policies and practices would have the most benefit. Working sessions brought together consumers, students, practitioners from the field, regional partnerships, and state department personnel. Now people are using outcomes for specific planning and accountability purposes, and every year Vermont compiles an annual social Well-Being Report. Wherever possible, these indicators are collected for each of the twelve regions so policymakers can compare their progress to other regions and learn from each other.

Wisconsin could consider creating a similar process. As an agency that provides services to individuals and families, DWD would be a primary contributor to such an effort.

Tight-lens or early intervention and service coordination. Tight-lens strategies are characterized by (1) an intentional focus on individuals and families already involved in government programs and (2) coordination of services to assure the family receives the help it needs to address current and future problems as quickly as possible. Through research and experience, W-2 agencies are finding that their client base often overlaps with the client base of other intensive intervention programs such as drug and alcohol treatment programs, child welfare, mental health, and the criminal justice system. For example, one study found that nearly two-fifths of W-2 applicants have been investigated for child abuse and/or neglect in the previous ten years.[16]

Coordinating services across systems allows caseworkers to identify and address problems early on and helps avoid mixed messages and conflicting service plans, increasing the intervention's long-term success. Thus, early intervention is the key to tight-lens initiatives. Many efforts are already underway to ensure that early interventions are possible. One such effort is Wraparound Milwaukee, which began in October 1999. The program represents a collaboration between the Divisions of Supported Living, Children and Family Services, Health Care Financing in DHFS and the Division of Workforce Solutions in DWD. Its goals include both improved client outcomes and a system wide transformation of service delivery.

Wraparound Milwaukee targets families simultaneously engaged in three systems: W-2, Child Welfare Safety Services, and Substance Abuse and/or Mental Health Services. These families, if they choose to, can participate in family support team meetings. At these meetings, both formal and informal support providers are present to help the family develop a "Plan of Care." Formal supports typically include the Safety Services provider, the drug and alcohol treatment provider, the W-2 case manager (FEP), and workers from other systems that are involved with the family. Family members, friends, ministers, and others can participate as informal supports.

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[16] Mark Courtney, Irving Piliavin, and Peter Power. "Involvement of TANF Applicants with Child Protective Services," Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper no. 1229-01, July 2001.

Intergenerational services. Intergenerational services are characterized by (1) an intentional focus on the relatives of individuals already involved in government programs and (2) the targeting of coordinated services to these relatives. The focus is on eliminating problems for those already in the system—those at risk of negative outcomes. Working holistically and intensively with families (the multi-generation approach) is analogous to attacking problems through a close-up telescopic lens. Here, we may have a family that already is connected with several systems—welfare, criminal justice, health, special education, child protective services, child support, and so forth. There may be young children, but also older children who are already evidencing poor socialization and who are at risk of making counterproductive choices. The fundamental task here may be to find ways of blending the separate systems together so that the whole family is treated coherently.

W-2 agencies could take the early intervention theory one step further into intergenerational services. In intergenerational services, the case manager is explicitly targeting the children in the family, who, as research has shown, are at greater risk of becoming poor themselves. In this approach, the W-2 agencies could operate their own intergenerational services, partner with a community organization, or simply provide the opportunity for the family group to access the services of the other agency. The W-2 agency could, for example, send home flyers with clients, allow the service provider to set up a table at the Job Center, or incorporate the services of the other agency as a voluntary activity in the family's employability plan.

The life trajectory framework. Since the IP approach essentially is a way of thinking about the organization and delivery of social assistance, having an organizing framework is important. Although other frameworks might work just as well, we find the *life trajectory framework* to be particularly useful and offer it as a guiding example. When thinking about the investment-prevention perspective, it is important to remember that interventions can occur at different ages. Each age grouping offers opportunities for early detection and intervention. Under inevitable resource constraints, it is likely that choices must be made regarding how and where to intervene. One might not be able to make all possible investments. By employing a framework for thinking through options, one might be able to fully assess choices and tradeoffs.

Given our limited intent in this paper, we start with broad categories of initiatives that encompass only part of the life trajectory—from pregnancy to the transition to adulthood:

- ***Prenatal investments***—Provide proper physical development of the fetus and address counterproductive behaviors that may impede that development.
- ***Early childhood investments***—Stimulate cognitive and emotional growth, prepare children for entry into society, and detect developmental issues.
- ***School readiness investments***—Further encourage cognitive development and the social discipline necessary to do well in structured learning environments.
- ***Crises and barrier remediation***—Provide basic protections to children against neglect and abuse, and intervene where serious contextual or personal challenges present themselves.
- ***School and family supports***—Provide supports to families and communities to create enriched developmental environments.
- ***Child to adolescent transitions***—Provide the same kind of supports to those moving into

the ages where risks increase, particularly with regard to drugs, sex, gangs, and illegal activities, and encourage success in middle and high school.

- ***Adolescent supports***—Deal with problems and challenges that arise during the teen years, especially for adolescents at risk in other ways, such as lack of school achievement, teenage pregnancy, drug or alcohol issues, etc.
- ***Youth to adult transitions***—Help low-income youth move on to opportunities for postsecondary education and vocational skills, or into the labor market.

This list can be thought of as a mini-life-course perspective, with different issues arising for different age groups. At each critical juncture in the development of a child (or youth), there exist unique challenges and opportunities. Families and communities have obligations to make the appropriate investments, economic, emotional, and social, that optimize the likelihood that the child will become a fully integrated and productive adult. Appropriate investment, of course, does not always happen, for reasons sometimes within the purview of parents or guardians. In such cases, communities might well be justified in intervening.

Policy officials designing IP interventions can systematically review existing services in terms of which dimensions of the life trajectory are adequately covered and which need further development. Thus the framework is a useful planning tool.

Question 5: How Do We Turn an Investment-Prevention Strategy into Something Real?

Getting from concept to reality is always a challenge. Responding to the federal disposition to treat social problems through narrow and categorical programs, Wisconsin (not unlike most other states) has a series of highly targeted programs designed to meet the needs of families in crisis. All these programs are important, but each focuses almost exclusively on those in crisis. And once a family is in crisis, there is no turning back the clock for the children involved; they have already felt the effects of being without adequate income, without adequate shelter, and in an unsafe situation. In addition, moving a family out of crisis requires significant investment of time and money.

Some Guiding Principles. Translating the IP perspective into substantive policies and programs is not a rote function. Local circumstances and preferences ultimately dictate how individual communities respond to the challenge. Still, one can be guided by a set of principles and decision points that help planners think through critical issues. Therefore, we offer some principles to guide planners as they think through what is required to pursue an IP perspective.

1. ***The flexible telescope:*** Which end of the telescope do local agencies use? Do they provide less intensive help to broad population groups and more intensive assistance to targeted groups, principles with which Wisconsin has experience but which might be extended more creatively? Local planners need to sort out priorities that reflect local circumstances and preferences. We think there is no set answer to this conundrum.

2. ***No wrong door:*** Where should IP services be located, and do integrated systems of service delivery demand large bureaucracies? Simply collocating agencies does not result in integrated service delivery. Institutional philosophies must be blended, common vocabularies adopted, and technologies and norms shared. Communication is the key to getting people in need to the right place, no matter where they first engage public and private agencies. Even in the absence of physical collocation and collaboration, systems can work together to ensure that families get what they need, and that is not necessarily what the agency they first contact offers.
3. ***Different age points of entry:*** We often think of prevention as focusing on the youngest children, even starting at the prenatal stage of development. But because it may not be feasible to catch all in our net at such an early stage, we might well consider how we incorporate individuals and families at a later stage. In addition, distressed families initially may come in contact with agencies for a limited purpose, e.g., an adolescent with school or legal problems. But this problem may be an indicator of systemic issues affecting the family and of family dysfunction. Home visits might uncover these broader problems.
4. ***Wrap-around services and collaboration:*** Collaboration has been called "an unnatural act between nonconsenting adults." Everyone talks about it, but there are fewer real-life examples where collocation has become true integration. Turf, funding silos, and different vocabularies and technologies all separate programs and services. Merely mandating integration might prove futile. Rather, we might need to explore the "lighthouse" sites where model efforts exist and transfer those exemplars elsewhere—dissemination by example rather than fiat.
5. ***Signaling:*** Wisconsin was very successful in diverting families from cash assistance. It sent effective institutional signals that the new world of social assistance was about work (and preparing for work). We now must send out a more complex set of signals about a new set of policy goals, while not diminishing the force of the work message. For example, the state might begin developing signals that marriage, good parenting, and wise fertility decisions (among other behaviors) are social outcomes of consequence to the state. This, in turn, would affect how state-local contracts are developed, what is measured and monitored, and what institutional outcomes are rewarded or punished.
6. ***An engaged community:*** The IP perspective is multidimensional, encompassing many aspects of family and community functioning. No single agency or program is solely responsible and whole communities must be engaged in developing prevention agendas, creative linkages among providers and systems at the local level, and local "ownership" of these agendas.
7. ***An involved family:*** There is a delicate balance between helping folks become self-sufficient, independent, and functional and simply creating another form of dependency. Service providers must remain sensitive to this balance and develop techniques where help does not take away the independence and initiative of those they serve. Prevention also requires the active participation of the family. No program can have a lasting effect without individuals taking responsibility for their actions.

Next, we focus in a little more detail on some of the more pressing challenges and controversies associated with an IP perspective.

Challenges Associated with an IP Perspective. If developing a fully matured IP approach to social assistance were an easy task, it would have been done by now in many communities. Those planners who are attracted to an IP perspective must be fully cognizant of the challenges associated with this particular policy road. Clearly, there are legitimate concerns that need to be addressed by those thinking through an IP strategy. Below, we introduce a number of them.

What's the role of government in family/prevention issues? How do we justify new and larger roles for government, particularly for W-2? Traditionally, there is no public responsibility for family issues, except where a clear mandate exists, such as child protective services. We accord a good deal of authority to families, or to those private and religious organizations that serve them. In an era of small government and limited public responsibility, would an IP agenda push the public role too far? What are some of the justifications for moving in this direction? What are some of the risks, and why is it worth taking those risks?

No public and political consensus, as there is on work. Although there was both a consensus on work as an appropriate normative goal for welfare reform and a track record concerning successful approaches, neither exists for some of the objectives normally associated with IP-oriented reforms. For example, there exists little definitive empirical information on how government might encourage marriage. Of course, the same claim might have been made about getting welfare recipients into the labor force not too long ago.

The structural challenge. Wisconsin, perhaps more than any other state, has forged close connections between its former welfare bureaucracy and its workforce bureaucracy. This has both symbolic and substantive importance, and should not necessarily be revisited. But the institutional connections with service programs that traditionally have focused on family functioning constitute more of a challenge. At a minimum, government must be creative in developing venues for ensuring continuous and effective communication among systems that affect families.

Does technology drive or constrain practice? There is some concern that technology, particularly the state's computer system CARES, drives practice and constrains how frontline workers interact with families. The state's Financial and Employment Planners (FEPs) must navigate a very complex set of screens. Observers of frontline practice in recent evaluations have noted anecdotally that the care and feeding of CARES may inhibit workers from moving into individual and family functioning domains that may seem warranted by behavioral or other evidence.

Finding the right performance measures. Practice is shaped by the outcomes selected for measurement and for rewards. Thus, federal TANF measures subject to penalties and high-performance bonus rewards exert a disproportionate influence on institutional behavior. Error rates in the Food Stamp program, for example, consume much attention on the part of state welfare officials even though most no longer believe that this is a constructive outcome on which to focus. Prevention will really become a program priority if we find ways to incorporate such activities and outcomes into mechanisms devoted to measurement and monitoring. But developing good social indicators focused on family formation and functioning can prove to be a difficult task.

Personal freedom and appropriate levels of intervention. What is the appropriate relationship with families in need of help? How deeply do we want to get involved? How do we balance the desire to optimize self-reliance with the adoption of a more ambitious set of outcomes? How do we pursue long-term goals for troubled families without becoming too invasive and ignoring reasonable claims to privacy and independence from public oversight?

How do we deal with the stigma/engagement issues? If we reach out to families through welfare agencies, we raise issues of stigma and engagement. A complicating fact is that W-2 does not enjoy a salubrious reputation in all quarters. The state of Ohio, for example, explicitly decided to carry out its TANF-supported early childhood home visiting and development initiative through local health departments, so that the welfare stigma might be lessened and cooperation increased. This is an offshoot of the signaling question, but it has a deeper set of ramifications.

Competing priorities and constituencies. Determining whether to use the limited funds to target broad populations or focus on the most dysfunctional families is a process that requires serious discussions among all relevant stakeholders. Such decisions may also be subject to the changing economic tide. With resources already becoming tight, communities will have to decide if they will be spread too thin if economic slowdowns and congressional retrenchments materialize. There's the potential of creating expectations that cannot possibly be satisfied.

The challenges associated with pursuing an IP agenda are many and difficult. Some touch upon the very basic issues about the appropriate role of government and where scarce resources might best be expended. But the fact that the IP perspective raises very difficult political questions in no way makes the effort any less worthwhile.

Question 6: What Are the Next Steps?

The attention being paid to the IP perspective is the result of several shifts taking place during the first stage of welfare reform:

1. W-2 agencies are engaging their entire caseloads and discovering that some families have multiple barriers to employment and self-sufficiency.
2. W-2 agencies are focused on helping the newly employed and discovering that family issues may be holding parents back from moving up the employment ladder.
3. W-2 agencies have changed in nature from reactive institutions to dynamic institutions engaged in their communities; they anticipate issues rather than simply react to them.
4. W-2 agencies are learning the value of collaboration through their experiences in the one-stop job centers.
5. Wisconsin is taking advantage of the flexibility in TANF to fund programs in DWD as well as DHFS.

These shifts have enabled service providers and policymakers to recognize how closely work and family programs interrelate. At the same time, they have highlighted impediments to further progress embedded within the current system

For example, a number of W-2 providers argue that they are already heavily involved in IP activities. They point out, however, that the level of support for these types of initiatives is not strong. They noted that state contracts do not specifically indicate that these are important undertakings, and the performance measures and stated W-2 goals did not encompass their full range of activities. Because so many families had left assistance for work, agencies were enjoying the luxury of a small cash caseload, able to spend more time with the families still on assistance and the new families coming in to apply for assistance.

But the CARES system does not record many of these activities, and the local agencies are repeatedly told that "if it is not recorded in the CARES system it does not exist." Many of the individuals and families touched by such services are not open and counted "cases" and thus may seem invisible to those judging performance. There are no standards assessing agency performance in areas such as family formation, fertility decisions, parenting quality, or the other functional areas often deemed essential to an IP agenda. Finally, judgments about "right of first selection" or other rewards for good production do not encompass performance in traditional IP areas.[17] Agencies feared that if budgets became tight and the goals they were currently pursuing were not specifically spelled out, they would have to shift their attention elsewhere.

At the same time, W-2 agency managers suggested that verbal encouragement has been forthcoming from state officials. This puts agency managers in a difficult position. Many of them believe these activities are critical to doing an adequate job of serving their communities. This suggests to us that the first and most salient step to be taken is to give high priority to an IP perspective.

What can and should the state do to sustain and advance an IP agenda? The IP perspective can best be thought of as a community undertaking. Goals are best identified at this level, since communities are in the best situation to know what is important. Services and assistance will probably come from a network of public and private systems, since it is likely that multifaceted strategies will be needed to address even modest objectives. And accountability should be set at the community level.

But local planning should not take place in a vacuum. The federal and state governments remain important players. They must continue to provide resources. They must ensure that child, family, and community indicators are developed and that a data infrastructure exists to assess the well-being of populations of interest, or accountability is impossible. And they must continue to monitor, evaluate, and disseminate knowledge and expertise. Their role is to facilitate but not dictate, to encourage but not prescribe. In some respects, the ultimate role of the state may be to get out of the way of locals and permit them to develop context-sensitive plans for dealing with locally determined issues. This supportive role should not be interpreted

[17] These points were raised during a number of interviews between the authors and local W-2 officials.

as relegating state and federal officials to a peripheral status. They can do much to facilitate or hinder the realization of an effective IP agenda.

Rather than prescribing process and specific policy and program rules, the state might consider the following:

1. ***Initiate a dialogue.*** Several sustained dialogues would create momentum toward a fully formed IP perspective. The first would be a dialogue within DWD to articulate an IP perspective within the philosophical and normative framework of W-2. The second would initiate formal and continuous discussions with key officials in other agencies and departments including DHFS. The third dialogue would be between state and local officials and presumably would focus on how federal and state resources and regulations can be modified to encourage interventions and initiatives that will support healthy individuals, families, and communities.

2. ***Vision/goal articulation.*** DWD and its partners could set out a vision of what the state wants to accomplish, leading by inspiration rather than regulation. This would be an important step in developing a new set of signals for local communities and agencies carrying out public functions.

   The stated goal of DWD and W-2 could be to work with the community to support a prevention perspective. In addition, DWD and DHFS may want to make their connection through the work–family nexus more explicit than it currently is. Their mission statements do not exclude the possibility of a shared goal but they do not expressly state one. DWD's mission is to provide a system of employment-focused programs and services that enable individuals and employers to participate fully in Wisconsin's economy. DHFS's mission is to lead the nation in fostering healthy, self-reliant individuals, and families. DWD and DHFS might want to consider creating a shared mission statement that makes this connection between productive workers, strong families, and healthy children.

   To put this new mission into action, the two agencies could review their policies and practices to ensure that both families and work receive support in each agency. DWD could also consider incorporating prevention and healthy families into W-2's eight philosophical goals. All of these steps would go a long way in getting the signals right for W-2 agencies, clients, and the general public.

3. ***Monitoring/accountability.*** The state's management focus should be on outcomes, not process, and on becoming even more serious about a performance-based relationship between DWD and local communities. Social indicators need to be developed on the basis of family and community functional attributes, including family formation and child development. A supportive data infrastructure must also be developed.

4. ***Facilitate technical assistance and local problem solving.*** The state should encourage the sharing of good ideas and technology, bring in experts and innovators from elsewhere, and initiate a dialogue among local decision makers. There exists extraordinary imagination and entrepreneurship at the local level, but they are not always rewarded for sharing local

insights, particularly when the state uses competition as a motivational device. We must find venues and opportunities to encourage such sharing.[18]

5. ***Improve executive agency communications and cooperation.*** DWD and its partners should develop mechanisms to improve communications among state executive agencies without creating any super agency. Such communications might range from ongoing informal communications to developing a child and family agenda out of the Governor's office. The specific mechanisms used may be less important than the intent to create a spirit of cooperation.

6. ***Complete the devolution revolution.*** Integration and "silo-breaking" is best focused at the local level, where it is most likely to happen. The new state role is to facilitate this and not get in the way.

This final point is the core of any future IP strategy. We cannot envision any realistic strategy proceeding absent real local ownership and engagement. The IP perspective inevitably involves a heavy use of service strategies. Unlike income-transfer initiatives (e.g., Social Security), such strategies cannot be well developed and managed from central levels of government such as Washington D.C. or state capitals. They are best crafted close to where needy families live. Higher levels of government can set a vision, measure appropriate outcomes, and create the right incentives. But locals must determine specific strategies and make them work.

Conclusion

The reform agendas of the late 1980s and 1990s have slowly reintroduced a behavior-focused, family-oriented approach into our social assistance strategies. This could clearly be seen as far back as Wisconsin's Learnfare and Ohio's LEAP programs. In recent years, Wisconsin has made significant investments in families and communities through W-2, particularly through the short-lived Community Reinvestment dollars.

What we call the IP perspective potentially deals with a range of issues, from intensively working with multi-challenged families to intervening early to reduce the probabilities of future problems, sometimes even across generations. In short, the IP perspective represents a vision rather than a technology and there are numerous strategies for accomplishing this vision. This paper outlines some of them, along with a number of challenges that must be addressed.

The future role of prevention as a reform theme is not certain, however. Emerging resource constraints and the upcoming reauthorization of TANF will result in a serious review of the

[18] Two models for accomplishing this come to mind. One is the Welfare Peer Assistance Network venue already employed by networks of states in the upper Midwest and West Coast. A second model is the County-To-County model developed at IRP that used satellite-based distance learning techniques for facilitating the sharing of local best practices.

legitimate purposes of social assistance, and perhaps some reallocation and prioritizing of where reform energies are spent. This period of uncertainty may raise additional challenges but it can also be recast as an era of opportunity—a transition point where the next generation of reform finds its direction and voice.